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(54) Title: METHOD OF AND SYSTEM FOR DISTRIBUTING ELECTRONIC COUPONS OVER A NETWORK AFTER THE CONSUMMATION OF A PURCHASE TRANSACTION
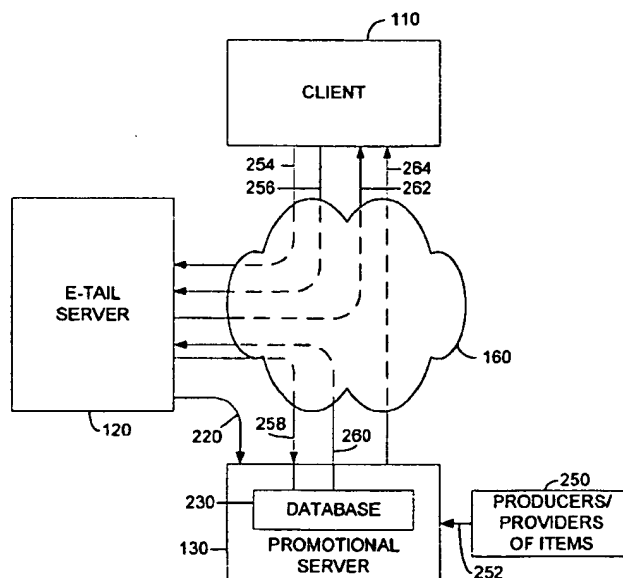
(57) Abstract: A system for distributing electronic coupons over a network includes: an e-tail server system (120) to offer at least one item for sale; a database (230) with at least one promotional item linked to an electronic coupon for a secondary item; a client system (110) selectively coupleable to the e-tail server to initiate a purchase transaction; a search device for searching the database (230) after the purchase transaction is consummated to determine if the purchased item is a promotional item, and if it is, retrieving the e-coupond for the secondary item that is linked to the promotional item; and display means to display to e-coupon for the secondary item to the client system.

METHOD OF AND SYSTEM FOR DISTRIBUTING ELECTRONIC COUPONS OVER A NETWORK AFTER THE CONSUMMATION OF A PURCHASE TRANSACTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to a method of and system for distributing electronic coupons over a network and more specifically to a method of and system for determining whether an item selected by a client from an e-tail server is associated with a promotion and, if it is, providing an electronic coupon to the client either for the selected item or for an item other than the selected item.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In order to increase the number of new customers who buy a particular product, many retail stores, and grocery stores in particular, set up a database of certain items that it sells and links each of these primary items to a secondary item that is different from the item to which it is linked for the purpose of promoting the secondary item. As a customer is checking out and each item is scanned at the checkout, the items are monitored and simultaneously compared to the items in the database to determine whether any of the items are associated with a secondary item. If an item is associated with a secondary item, a coupon for the secondary item is printed out for the customer to use at a later date.

This system enables the store to provide to a customer, who may not normally purchase the secondary item, an incentive for purchasing the secondary item, simply because the customer purchased the particular item that was linked to the secondary item. The system thus potentially creates a new customer for the secondary item. While this system is in use in the so-called "brick and mortar" outlets, there is no such system which enables an online retail store to provide coupons to customers for items in this manner.

Accordingly, it is an object of this invention to provide a method of and system for distributing electronic coupons over a network, in which the electronic coupons are

for items which are linked to primary items purchased by the client, the electronic coupons being redeemable at a later date.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention is directed to a method of and system for distributing electronic coupons over a network in which the electronic coupons may be redeemable at a later date. An e-tail server includes a plurality of items for sale and has access to a promotional server that includes an inventory of certain of the items and promotional linking code for linking items to promotional terms that define an electronic coupon. A client system is coupled to the e-tail server system over the network to initiate a purchase transaction by selecting one or more items from the items for sale. The system determines whether the items selected by the client system are linked to promotional data defining an electronic coupon and if so, an electronic coupon is generated from the promotional data and provided to the client system. The electronic coupon is generated after the completion of the purchase transaction, for redemption in a future purchase transaction. The electronic coupon can represent a promotion either for the selected item or for an item other than the selected item.

According to the invention, the system for distributing electronic coupons over a network such as the internet includes an e-tail server system having a computer processor and associated memory, the e-tail server system offering a plurality of items for sale, a promotional server including a database having an inventory of certain of the plurality of items for sale, the certain items being promotional items, and promotional linking code for linking the promotional items to promotional data that define an electronic coupon. A client system includes a computer processor and associated memory, the client system being selectively coupleable to the e-tail server system over the network to initiate a purchase transaction by selecting an item from the plurality of items for sale. A searching device searches the database to determine whether the selected item is a promotional item linked to promotional terms by the promotional linking code, and electronic coupon generating means provides screen display data to the client system for items linked to the promotional terms, the screen display data being representative of the electronic coupon defined by the promotional terms. The

link determining means may determine whether the selected item is linked to promotional terms by the promotional linking code after the purchase transaction is consummated. The electronic coupon may represent a promotion for the selected item or for an item other than the selected item. The promotional server may be included in the e-tail server system. The plurality of items for sale may be products and/or services.

In another embodiment, the system for distributing electronic coupons over a network such as the internet includes an e-tail server system including a computer processor and associated memory, the e-tail server system offering at least one item for sale, a database including an inventory of the at least one promotional item offered for sale by the e-tail server system, the at least one promotional item being linked to electronic coupon data that defines an electronic coupon for a secondary item and a client system including a computer processor and associated memory. The client system is selectively coupleable to the e-tail server system over the network for the purpose of initiating a purchase transaction, the client system initiating the purchase transaction by selecting one of the at least one item for sale. A search device searches the database after the purchase transaction is consummated to determine if the selected item is a promotional item in the inventory and, if the selected item is a promotional item, retrieves the electronic coupon data for the secondary item that is linked to the selected item. Coupon generating means provides screen display data from the electronic coupon data to the client system, the screen display data being representative of an electronic coupon for the secondary item. The database may be located on the e-tail server. The client system may be a personal computer, an interactive television system, a personal digital assistant or a cellular telephone.

The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network such as the internet according to the invention includes the steps of establishing a connection over the network between an e-tail server system including items for sale and a client system, the client system initiating a purchase transaction by selecting one of the items for sale, and consummating the purchase transaction. The e-tail server system accesses a promotional server including an inventory of certain of the items for sale and links to promotional terms for the items, the promotional terms defining an electronic coupon,

the promotional server determines whether the selected item is linked to the promotional terms. Screen display data is provided to the client system for items linked to the promotional terms, the screen display data being representative of the electronic coupon. The electronic coupon may represent a promotion for the selected item or a promotion for an item other than the selected item. The screen display data may be provided to the client system directly from the promotional server over the network and the screen display data may be provided by the promotional server to the e-tail server system client system over the network, and the e-tail server system may provide the screen display data to the client system over the network.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing and other objects of this invention, the various features thereof, as well as the invention itself may be more fully understood from the following description when read together with the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a diagrammatic view of a system for distributing electronic coupons in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a flow diagram of a method of distributing electronic coupons in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a more detailed diagrammatic view of the system of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is a diagrammatic view of another embodiment of the system of FIG. 1; and

FIG. 5 is a diagrammatic view of yet another embodiment of the system of FIG. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention is directed to a method of and system for distributing electronic coupons over a network. An electronic coupon is essentially a token, issued by or under the authority of the issuer for the benefit of the recipient. Typically, the recipient receives the electronic coupon and subsequently redeems it for the prescribed benefit at some later point in time. Preferably, the electronic coupon enables or modifies an anticipated transaction such as by providing a discount in the price of

goods or services provided by the issuer or the issuer's agent. According to the invention, the distribution of electronic coupons is determined based on the products or services purchased by the recipient. If a particular product or service selected by the recipient for purchase is a promotional item, an electronic coupon is distributed to the recipient. The electronic coupon need not be for an item which is the same as or related to the promotional item.

FIG. 1 shows a diagram of a system 100 for distributing electronic coupons in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. The system 100 includes client system 110, server system 120 and server system 130 all connected to a common communications channel 160. Preferably, the client system 110, server system 120 and server system 130 can each be a personal computer such as an IBM PC or IBM PC compatible system or an APPLE® MacINTOSH® system or a more advanced computer system such as an Alpha-based computer system available from Compaq Computer Corporation or SPARC® Station computer system available from SUN Microsystems Corporation, although a main frame computer system can also be used. Preferably, the communications channel 160 is a TCP/IP-based network such as the Internet or an intranet, although almost any well known LAN, WAN or VPN technology can be used.

In one preferred embodiment of the invention, the client system 110 is an IBM PC compatible system operating a Microsoft Windows® operating system, and server system 120 and server system 130 are configured as web servers providing access to information such as web pages in HTML format via the HyperText Transport Protocol (http). The client system 110 includes software to allow viewing of web pages, commonly referred to as a web browser, thus being capable of accessing web pages located on server system 120 and server system 130. Alternatively, client system 110 can be any wired or wireless device that can be connected to a communications network, such as an interactive television system, such as WEBTV, a personal digital assistant (PDA) or a cellular telephone. In this preferred embodiment, server system 120 is an e-tail server offering a plurality of items for sale over the Internet and server 130 is a promotional server that includes an inventory of the promotional items offered for sale by the e-tail server 120, promotional terms that define electronic coupons and

promotional linking code for linking the promotional items in the inventory to the promotional terms that define the electronic coupons. The items offered for sale by the e-tail server 120 can be products and/or services.

In one preferred embodiment, server system 120 includes web server software that is adapted to produce an electronic coupon or a book of electronic coupons that is transferred to the client system 110 in the form of a cookie that is stored in memory at the client system. Preferably, the electronic coupon is a data structure which can include any or all of the following information elements: data representative of an electronic coupon serial number or identification number data representative of a unique key that can be used to validate or authenticate the coupon data representative of the vendor that authorized the coupon and will redeem the coupon data representative of the nature of the discount or access provided by the coupon data representative of the server or entity that issued the coupon. In one preferred embodiment, the electronic coupon can be issued as part of an electronic coupon book. The coupon book can include data representative of a version number for the electronic coupon book and data representative of a serial number or identification number for the electronic coupon book.

In one preferred embodiment, the electronic coupon contains all the information necessary to redeem the coupon. Specifically, the electronic coupon identifies the grantor (i.e., the party or vendor that will redeem the electronic coupon), the nature of the discount or benefit provided and a unique serial number or other data structure that permits the electronic coupon to be authenticated or validated. Thus, a server redeeming this type of electronic coupon can obtain all the information necessary to redeem from the electronic coupon. The server can even include the software necessary to authenticate or validate the electronic coupon.

In an alternative embodiment, the electronic coupon book includes a unique serial number or identification number and data structure useful for authenticating or validating the electronic coupon book. The actual content of the electronic coupon book can be determined for example, by visiting a website which reads the coupon book serial number and provides the user with listings of the coupons available. A benefit to this configuration is the organization that issues the electronic coupon book

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can add vendors even after the electronic coupon book has been issued. Thus, if a vendor signs up with the organization that issues electronic coupon books after a particular coupon book has been issued to a client, the vendor can be added to the electronic coupon book at a later date. In order to redeem this type of electronic coupon the server that intends to redeem the electronic coupon must connect to an authentication server which will authenticate or validate the coupon book and indicate the nature of the benefit of the electronic coupon to the server requesting authentication/validation. Another benefit of this configuration is that the coupons are relatively tamper proof due to the authentication and validation facilities. In many prior art systems, coupons could be copied and/or altered by the user with relative ease; in the absence of validation/authentication schemes, few reliable methods for detection of such counterfeits exist.

The promotional linking code can be programmed into the promotional server through the e-tail server, thereby enabling the e-tail website to program its own, in-house, promotions such as "in store" coupons. Additionally, the promotional linking code can be programmed into the promotional server by one or more of the producers of the goods or providers of the services that are available for sale on the e-tail website associated with the e-tail server 130, thereby enabling the producers of the goods or providers of the services to promote particular goods or services.

FIG. 2 shows a flow diagram 200 of a method of distributing electronic coupons in accordance with one preferred embodiment of the invention. In a preliminary step 210, the client system 110, FIG. 1, after establishing a connection with the e-tail server 130 over the communications channel 160, initiates a purchase transaction by selecting one or more items offered for sale by the e-tail server. This selection is typically carried out by the client "placing" the selected item into an online "shopping cart" for purchase, or in any other manner known in the art. Once the client has selected the items it wants to purchase, payment is rendered and the purchase transaction is consummated in the typical fashion, step 212. Upon consummation of the purchase transaction, the e-tail server 130 provides information identifying each of the purchased items to the promotional server 130 over the communications channel 160, step 214. Such identifying information can be the Universal Product Code (UPC) for each item,

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or any other identification indicia supplied by the e-tail website or by the manufacturers
or providers of the items. In step 216, the promotional server 130 determines whether
any of the purchased items are promotional items by searching its inventory of the
promotional items offered for sale by the e-tail server 120 to determine if any of the
purchased items are in the promotional item inventory and are therefore linked to
promotional data by the promotional linking code. If none of the items purchased are
promotional items, no electronic coupons are generated and the transaction is
completed. If the promotional server 130 determines that one or more of the purchased
items are promotional items linked to the promotional data by the promotional linking
code, electronic coupons are provided to the client system 110 for each of the
promotional items, step 218. The electronic coupons are then stored in memory on the
client system 110 for use in a future purchase transaction.

The preceding embodiment is shown in greater detail in Fig. 3. First, the e-tail
server 110 provides instructions 220 to the promotional server for generating
promotional links between a promotional item and a promotion. These instructions
include identification information for the promotional item and the promotional data
which defines the electronic coupon. The promotional data can either define an
electronic coupon that is redeemable for a discount on a secondary item, which may or
may not be related to the promotional item, or for a discount for the promotional item
itself. The promotional server 130 then constructs the promotional linking code that
links the promotional item to the promotional data. Additionally, a producer or
provider of items 250 can provide instructions 252 to the promotional server 130, for
the purpose of linking promotional items with promotional data for certain of its items,
as described above.

A user operating a client system 110 establishes a connection 254 to the e-tail
server 120 over the communication channel 160 for the purpose of initiating a purchase
transaction. The user selects one or more of the items offered for sale by the e-tail
server 120, typically by placing the items into a "shopping cart" on the e-tail server
website. The client system 110 then consummates the purchase transaction by sending
payment information 256 to the e-tail server 120. Upon consummation of the purchase
transaction, e-tail server 120 establishes a connection 258 to the promotional server 130

and provides the identifying information of the items purchased by the client 110 to the promotional server 130. Promotional server 130 then searches its database 230 to determine whether any of the purchased items are promotional items in the inventory that are linked to promotional data. If one or more of the purchased items are promotional items, promotional server 130 generates an electronic coupon for each promotional item based on the promotional data supplied by the e-tail server 120 or the producer/provider 250. The electronic coupon for each of the promotional items is then provided to the client 110 in the form of screen display data. As shown in Fig. 3, the electronic coupons can be provided from the promotional server 130 to the e-tail server 120 via connection 260 and then to the client 110 by the e-tail server 120 via connection 262. Alternatively, the electronic coupon can be transmitted directly to the client 110 by the promotional server 130 via connection 264. The electronic coupon is then stored in the memory of the client 110 for use in a subsequent purchase transaction.

In the subsequent purchase transaction, when the client system 110 establishes a connection to the e-tail server 120, the e-tail server 120 detects the electronic coupon stored in the memory of the client system 110. The e-tail system then authenticates the electronic coupon and modifies the purchase transaction accordingly. As discussed above, if the electronic coupon contains the information necessary to authenticate the electronic coupon, the electronic coupon can be authenticated and redeemed by the e-tail server. Alternatively, the e-tail server can access the promotional server that issued the coupon to obtain the information necessary for authenticating the coupon.

As described above, the electronic coupon may be redeemable for a discount on the purchased product in order to encourage repeat business, or for a discount on a secondary item in order to create new customers for an item. In the latter case, the secondary item may or may not be related to the promotional item. For example, for a grocery e-tail server, an electronic coupon for pasta sauce could be linked to the purchase of a pasta product, thus promoting a particular brand of pasta sauce to a client who is most likely intending to buy pasta sauce. Alternatively, the electronic coupon could be unrelated to the purchased item, such that the promotion is for an item that the

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client may not have considered purchasing, thus potentially creating a new customer for the item.

While the invention has been described as including one e-tail server that accesses a promotional server, a plurality of e-tail servers may be coupled to the promotional server in order to distribute electronic coupons to clients of the e-tail servers. Such a configuration is illustrated in Fig. 4. In this system 300, in addition to the e-tail server 120, a second e-tail server 140 is coupleable to the promotional server 130 over communications network 160 for the purpose of defining promotional items in the manner described above. Accordingly, the client 110 can access either e-tail server 120 or e-tail server 140 for the purpose of carrying out a purchase transaction over the communication channel 160 and either or both of the e-tail servers can access the promotional server 130. It will be understood that the promotional server can be accessed through any number of e-tail servers.

In another embodiment, the inventory of items for sale and the associated promotional data and promotional linking code are stored in a database server system on the e-tail server. Such a configuration is shown at 400 in FIG. 5. In this embodiment, e-tail server 150 is coupleable to client 110 over communications network 160. E-tail server 150 includes a database server system 152 which, as described above, includes an inventory of promotional items, promotional data defining electronic coupons and promotional linking code for linking the promotional items to the promotional data.

In this embodiment, the e-tail server 150 defines promotions locally within database server system 152. The client system 110 establishes a connection with e-tail server 150 over the communications network 160 for the purpose of initiating a purchase transaction. After the client system 110 selects items to purchase and consummates the purchase transaction, the e-tail server searches database server system 152 to determine if any of the items purchased by the client system are listed in the inventory as promotional items. If one or more of the items is in the inventory of database server system 152, an electronic coupon for each of the items, as defined by the promotional data linked to the promotional item by the promotional linking code, is

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transmitted to the client system 110 by the e-tail server 150 over the communications network 160.

Accordingly, the present invention provides a system for distributing electronic coupons over a network after the consummation of a purchase transaction. After the client system selects and purchases items from an e-tail server system, the promotional server searches its database of promotional items to determine whether any of the purchased items are promotional items. If any of the purchased items are promotional items, the promotional server provides electronic coupons to the client, the electronic coupons being defined by the promotional data linked to the promotional item in the promotional server database.

The invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or essential characteristics thereof. The present embodiments are therefore to be considered in respects as illustrative and not restrictive, the scope of the invention being indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description, and all changes which come within the meaning and range of the equivalency of the claims are therefore intended to be embraced therein.

What is claimed is:

1.   A system for distributing electronic coupons over a network comprising:

an e-tail server system including a computer processor and associated memory, said e-tail server system including items for sale;

a promotional server including a database having an inventory of certain of said items for sale, said certain items being promotional items, and promotional linking code for linking each of said promotional items to promotional data that define an electronic coupon;

a client system including a computer processor and associated memory, said client system being selectively coupleable to said e-tail server system over said network to initiate a purchase transaction by selecting an item from said plurality of items for sale;

a searching device for searching said database after the purchase transaction is consummated to determine whether said selected item is a promotional item linked to said promotional data by said promotional linking code; and

electronic coupon generating means for providing electronic coupons to said client system for items purchased by the client which are promotional items linked to said promotional data.

2.   The system according to claim 1 wherein said network is the internet.

3.   The system according to claim 2 wherein said electronic coupon represents a promotion for the selected item.

4.   The system according to claim 2 wherein said electronic coupon represents a promotion for an item other than the selected item.

5.   The system according to claim 2 wherein said promotional server is included in said e-tail server system.

6. The system of claim 2 wherein said items for sale are one or both of products and services.

7. The system of claim 2 wherein said client system is coupleable to said network by a wired connection.

8. The system of claim 7 wherein said client system is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, an interactive television system, a personal digital assistant and a cellular telephone.

9. The system of claim 2 wherein said client system is coupleable to said network by a wireless connection.

10. The system of claim 9 wherein said client system is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, an interactive television system, a personal digital assistant and a cellular telephone.

11. The system of claim 2 wherein said electronic coupon generating means provides said electronic coupons to said client in the form of screen display data.

12. A system for distributing electronic coupons over a network comprising:
an e-tail server system including a computer processor and associated memory, said e-tail server system offering at least one item for sale;
a database including an inventory of at least one promotional item offered for sale by said e-tail server system, said at least one promotional item being linked to electronic coupon data that defines an electronic coupon for a secondary product;
a client system including a computer processor and associated memory, said client system being selectively coupleable to said e-tail server system over said network for the purpose of initiating a purchase transaction, said client system initiating said purchase transaction by selecting one of said at least one item for sale;

a search device for searching said database after the purchase transaction is consummated to determine if said selected item is a promotional item in said inventory and, if said selected item is a promotional items in said inventory, retrieving said electronic coupon data for said secondary item that is linked to said at least one promotional item; and

coupon generating means for providing said electronic coupon defined by said electronic coupon data linked to said promotional item to said client system.

13.   The system according to claim 12 wherein said network is the internet.

14.   The system according to claim 13 wherein said database is located on said e-tail server.

15.   The system of claim 13 wherein said at least one item for sale is either a product or a service.

16.   The system of claim 13 wherein said client system is coupleable to said network by a wired connection.

17.   The system of claim 16 wherein said client system is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, an interactive television system, a personal digital assistant and a cellular telephone.

18.   The system of claim 13 wherein said client system is coupleable to said network by a wireless connection.

19.   The system of claim 12 wherein said client system is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, an interactive television system, a personal digital assistant and a cellular telephone.

20.   The system of claim 13 wherein said electronic coupon generating means provides said electronic coupons to said client in the form of screen display data.

21.   A method of distributing electronic coupons over a network comprising the steps of:

A.   establishing a connection over said network between an e-tail server system including items for sale and a client system;

B.   said client system initiating a purchase transaction by selecting one of said items for sale;

C.   consummating said purchase transaction;

D.   said e-tail server system accessing a promotional server including an inventory of promotional items for sale and links to promotional data for said promotional items, said promotional data defining an electronic coupon;

E.   said promotional server determining whether said selected item is a promotional item in said inventory; and

F.   providing screen display data for promotional items linked to said promotional terms to said client system, said screen display data being representative of said electronic coupon.

22.   The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network in accordance with claim 21 wherein said network is the internet.

23.   The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network in accordance with claim 22 wherein said electronic coupon represents a promotion for the selected item.

24.   The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network in accordance with claim 22 wherein said electronic coupon represents a promotion for an item other than the selected item.

25. The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network in accordance with claim 22 wherein said screen display data is provided to said client system directly from said promotional server over said network.

26. The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network in accordance with claim 22 wherein said screen display data is provided by said promotional server to said e-tail server system client system over said network, and said e-tail server system provides said screen display data to said client system over said network.

27. The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network in accordance with claim 22 wherein said items for sale are one or both of products and services.

28. The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network in accordance with claim 22 wherein said client system is connected to said network by a wired connection.

29. The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network in accordance with claim 28 wherein said client system is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, an interactive television system, a personal digital assistant and a cellular telephone.

30. The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network in accordance with claim 22 wherein said client system is connected to said network by a wireless connection.

31. The method of distributing electronic coupons over a network in accordance with claim 30 wherein said client system is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, an interactive television system, a personal digital assistant and a cellular telephone.
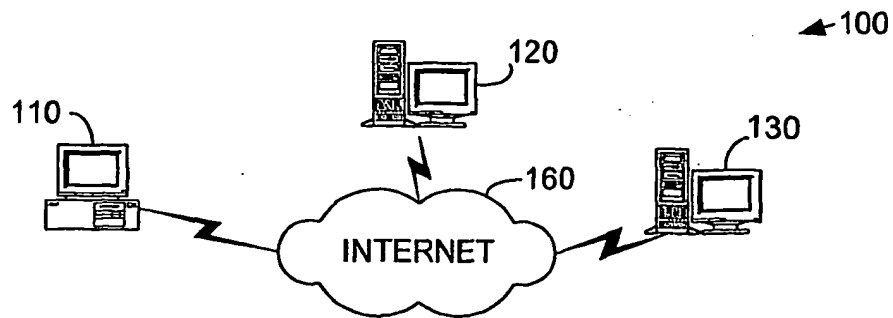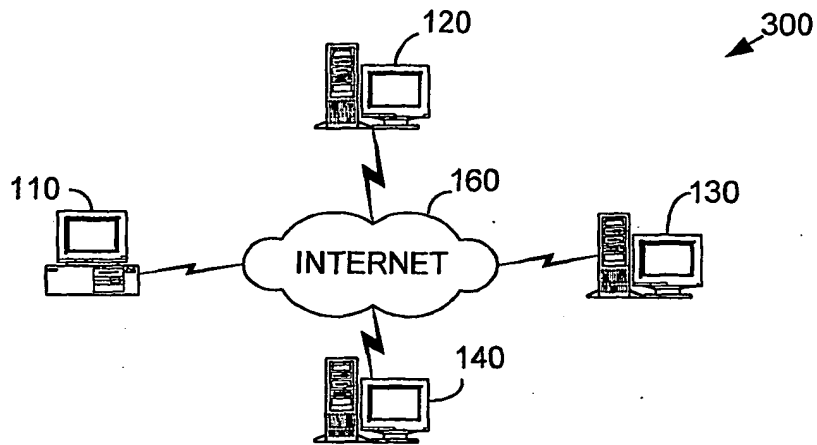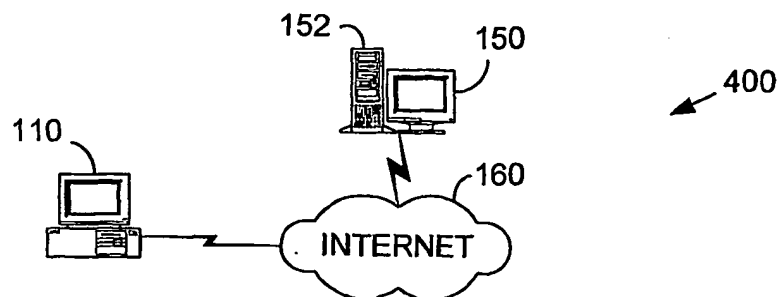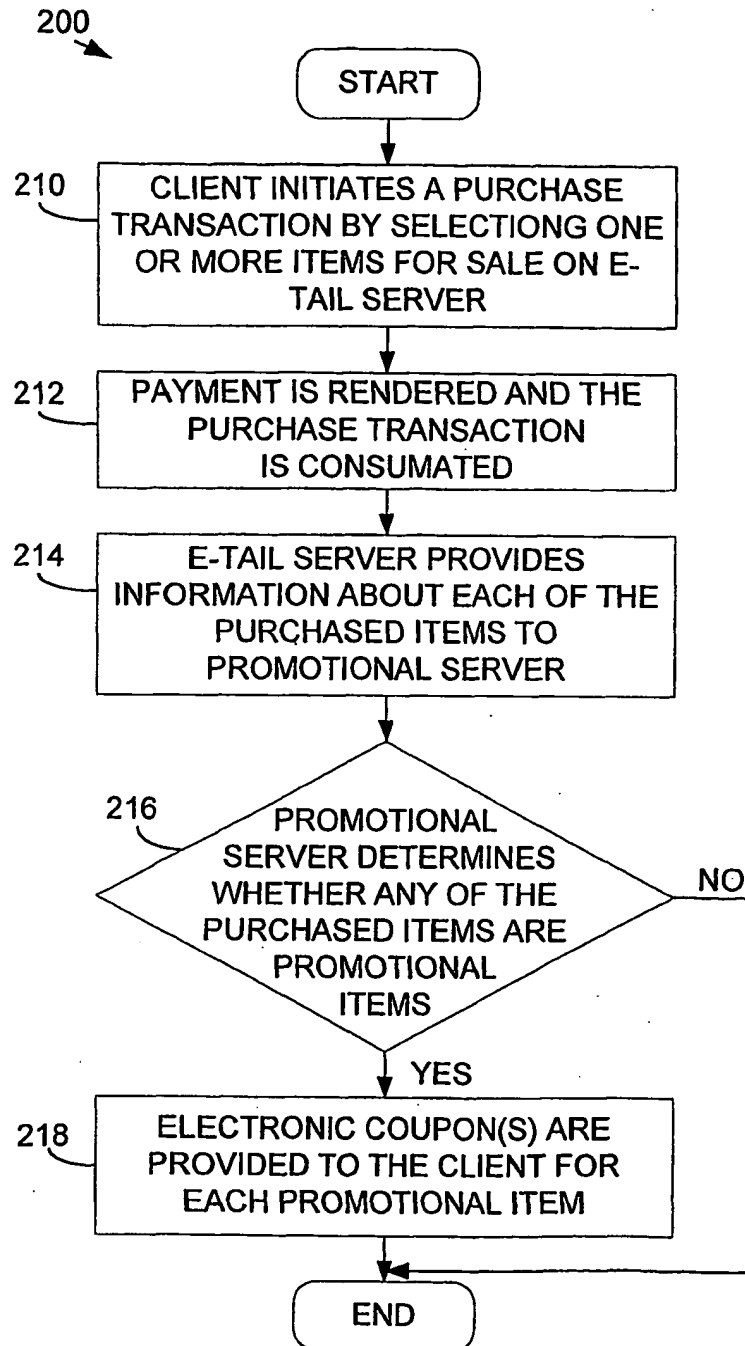
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FIG.1

FIG.4

FIG.5

200

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                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │    START    │
                    └─────────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
   210  │  CLIENT INITIATES A PURCHASE         │
        │  TRANSACTION BY SELECTIONG ONE       │
        │  OR MORE ITEMS FOR SALE ON E-        │
        │  TAIL SERVER                         │
        └──────────────────────────────────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
   212  │  PAYMENT IS RENDERED AND THE         │
        │  PURCHASE TRANSACTION                │
        │  IS CONSUMATED                       │
        └──────────────────────────────────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
   214  │  E-TAIL SERVER PROVIDES              │
        │  INFORMATION ABOUT EACH OF THE       │
        │  PURCHASED ITEMS TO                  │
        │  PROMOTIONAL SERVER                  │
        └──────────────────────────────────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
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216　PROMOTIONAL SERVER DETERMINES WHETHER ANY OF THE PURCHASED ITEMS ARE PROMOTIONAL ITEMS

NO

YES

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        ┌──────────────────────────────────────┐
   218  │  ELECTRONIC COUPON(S) ARE            │
        │  PROVIDED TO THE CLIENT FOR          │
        │  EACH PROMOTIONAL ITEM               │
        └──────────────────────────────────────┘
                           │
                           ▼
                    ┌─────────────┐
                    │    END      │
                    └─────────────┘
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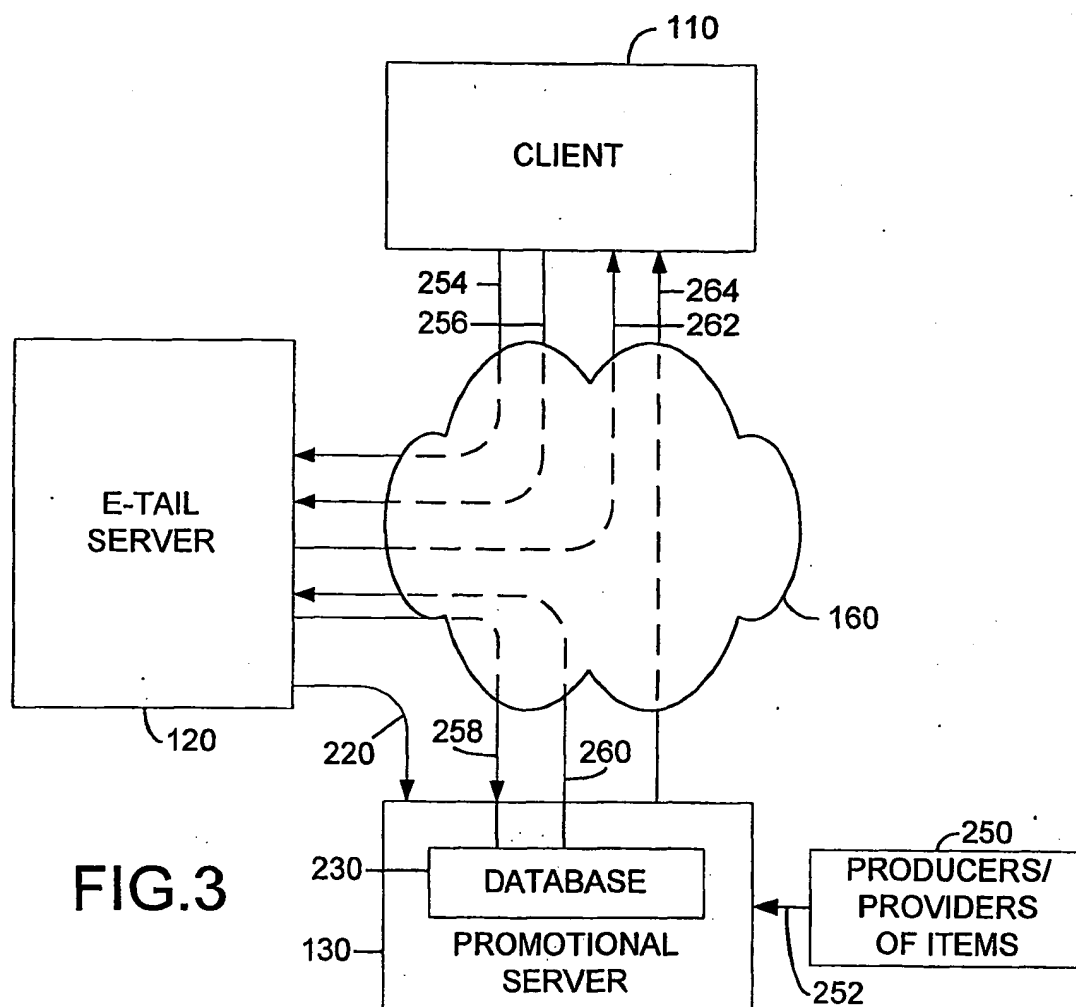
FIG.2

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FIG.3

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application N .

PCT/US01/14677

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC(7) : G06F 17/60
US CL : 705/14, 705/26, 705/27
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
   U.S. : 705/14, 705/26, 705/27

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
Please See Continuation Sheet

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 6,055,513 A (KATZ et al) 25 April 2000 (25.04.2000), abstract, col 1-12, Figures 1-	1-31
A	US 6,041,309 A (LAOR) 21 March 2000 (21.03.2000), abstract, whole document	1-31
A	US 5,832,457 A (O'BRIEN et al) 03 November 1998 (03.11.1998), abstract, whole document	1-31
A	US 5,612,868 A (OFF et al) 18 March 1997 (18.03.1997), abstract, whole document	1-31

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.   ☐ See patent family annex.

*	Special categories of cited documents:	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A"	document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E"	earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date		
"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means		
"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	"&"	document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
21 June 2001 (21.06.2001)	01 AUG 2001
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US	Authorized officer
Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231	Eric Stamber
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Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (July 1998)

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Continuation of Item 4 of the first sheet: The title is too long.

New title:

METTHOD AND SYSTEM FOR DISTRIBUTING ELECTRONIC COUPONS OVER A NETWORK AFTER THE CONSUMMATION OF A PURCHASE TRANSACTION

Continuation of B. FIELDS SEARCHED Item 3: East search (USPAT database) all of 705 class: search terms: all variations of e-coupons in connection with purchase transactions